


Do I Like You? Effects of Daily Negative Events and Implicit Self-Esteem on Daily Implicit Partner Regard

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Abstract

The current study examines explicit and implicit self-esteem as moderators of the daily association between negative events and implicit partner regard among cohabitating African American couples ($N = 360$). In a 21-day diary study, individuals with low (vs. high) implicit self-esteem showed a negative association between negative non-relationship and non-interpersonal events and implicit partner regard that day. Age was also a significant moderator such that, only among older participants, low implicit self-esteem individuals reported lower implicit partner regard on days with higher levels of negative relationship, non-relationship, and non-interpersonal events. Findings highlight the importance of implicit partner regard in the risk regulation system and underscore the importance of high implicit self-esteem as a protective factor for relationship functioning among African American couples.

Keywords

risk regulation model, implicit self-esteem, explicit self-esteem, implicit partner regard, daily events

Everyone has days when little things go wrong, or they experience interpersonal conflict. However, not everyone reacts to negative events and interactions in the same manner. For some people, these negative events can spill over into other aspects of their lives, influencing their relationship with their significant other consciously or unconsciously. Yet little research has examined associations between these events and daily levels of implicit (relatively unconscious, automatic) regard for a relationship partner, despite evidence that it is an important indicator of relationship functioning (LeBel & Campbell, 2009; McNulty et al., 2013). The current study extends previous work by testing whether implicit self-esteem moderates the relation between daily negative events and daily implicit partner regard.

Self-Esteem and Risk Regulation

The risk regulation model proposes that, although having a satisfying relationship requires accepting dependence and risking rejection, people are motivated to minimize the pain such rejection can bring (Murray et al., 2008). Because people have conflicting motives to self-protect and to promote relationships, the risk regulation system consists of a set of contingency rules that shift an individual's priorities between these two motives depending upon both the level of risk within the situation and chronic insecurities about

acceptance (Murray, Holmes, et al., 2006). The sociometer theory of self-esteem suggests that in response to perceived rejection, people with high self-esteem continue to feel accepted, whereas people with low self-esteem feel unaccepted (e.g., Leary et al., 1995; Vohs & Heatherton, 2001). Relatedly, the risk regulation system differs in sensitivity between people based upon individual differences in explicit self-esteem (Murray et al., 2008; Murray, Griffin, et al., 2006). People who generally feel valued and loved by their relationship partners and trust their own relational value (e.g., high self-esteem individuals) are more willing to risk dependence and prioritize relationship promotion after a self or relationship threat, drawing closer and evaluating their partner positively because they do not expect rejection. In contrast, people who chronically feel less positive about themselves and their partners' regard (i.e., low self-esteem individuals) are more sensitive to self and relationship threats and tend to prioritize self-protection following

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such threats, derogating their partner and the relationship (Murray et al., 1998).

This pattern can be found following threats to an individual's self-worth (e.g., guilt about a transgression, their intelligence; Murray et al., 1998) or the relationship (e.g., belief that their partner has concerns; Murray et al., 2002; conflict with a relationship partner; Murray et al., 2003). Importantly, the risk regulation system can also be activated at the daily level and for non-interpersonal events (e.g., professional failures; Murray, Griffin, et al., 2006). The current study therefore examines how daily negative events within the relationship, daily negative events with people other than the relationship partner, and daily negative non-interpersonal events are associated with relationship functioning. In addition, the current study builds upon previous risk regulation research by examining implicit and explicit self-esteem as unique moderators of these associations.

Implicit Self-Esteem and Relationship Functioning

Most of the work on the risk regulation model has focused on the moderating role of explicit self-esteem on explicit evaluations of the partner and relationship. Both implicit and explicit self-esteem form through interactions with close others, including early childhood experiences with parents (DeHart et al., 2006), and implicit self-esteem also functions like an implicit sociometer, searching the environment for cues of acceptance (DeHart et al., 2009). Correlations between implicit and explicit self-esteem tend to be small, suggesting these two constructs measure distinct aspects of self-evaluation, although they are unlikely to be wholly distinct (Bosson et al., 2000; Koole & Dehart, 2007). Given the interpersonal origins and functions of both explicit and implicit self-esteem, it seems reasonable to assume that both implicit and explicit beliefs about the self are (independently) related to people's implicit partner evaluations in response to negative interpersonal interactions.

Research has demonstrated that people with high implicit self-esteem also tended to have higher implicit evaluations of close others both cross-sectionally (DeHart et al., 2011) and over time (McNulty et al., 2014). In addition, research has found that implicit self-esteem moderates the risk regulation system (DeHart et al., 2009; Hamilton & DeHart, 2017; Peterson & DeHart, 2013) acting (like explicit self-esteem) as a cue for whether an individual can expect to be valued or rejected by their partner and, therefore, whether they prioritize relationship-promotion or self-protection in the face of a threat. For example, Peterson and DeHart (2013) found that high implicit self-esteem predicted more positive nonverbal behaviors toward a relationship partner (e.g., affectionate touch, smiling), but only when the relationship was threatened (not under neutral conditions). Thus, although higher implicit self-esteem is

likely positively related to relationship functioning overall (main effect), implicit self-esteem may also be related to implicit attitudes and behaviors toward a relationship partner in the face of negative daily events (moderation effect) by sensitizing the risk regulation system to cues of acceptance. The current study extends this work by examining implicit self-esteem (controlling for the effects of explicit self-esteem) as a moderator of the associations between daily negative events and an implicit measure of relationship functioning (i.e., implicit partner regard).

Implicit Partner Regard

Beliefs about a partner that are relatively unconscious and automatic appear to be an important factor in relationship functioning such that higher implicit partner regard is related to more positive daily behaviors and long-term outcomes. Positive implicit partner evaluations may reduce the chances of low explicit self-esteem individuals distancing following relationship threat (Murray et al., 2015, 2011) and are related to more positive daily relationship outcomes particularly among individuals with less positive explicit partner evaluations (LeBel & Campbell, 2013). Changes in implicit partner attitudes following the transition to parenthood (whether positive or negative) may predict poor relationship functioning (Murray et al., 2019). Implicit partner regard is also related to positive behavior toward a relationship partner (e.g., appreciation and cooperation) in a recorded interaction (Krause & Dufner, 2020) and has implications for nonverbal behaviors (e.g., hostility, openness, and affect) toward a relationship partner which are related to relationship satisfaction over the next week (Faure et al., 2018). Moreover, in a 4-year study of newlyweds, more positive implicit partner regard (but not conscious partner attitudes) predicted lower odds of decline in marital satisfaction (McNulty et al., 2013). Finally, positive implicit partner regard predicts lower chances of a break-up controlling for self-reported relationship satisfaction and conflict (Lee et al., 2010). In sum, previous research has demonstrated important implications of implicit partner regard for relationship functioning.

To our knowledge, no research has examined factors related to daily (or state) levels of implicit partner regard. However, research has examined factors that may influence implicit partner evaluations. In a cross-sectional study, DeHart and colleagues (2004) found that implicit evaluations of romantic partners were contingent on both individuals' explicit self-esteem and how things were currently going in their relationship. Specifically, among low explicit self-esteem individuals, implicit evaluations of romantic partners were high only when individuals had a positive perception of their current relationship quality. Among high explicit self-esteem individuals, implicit evaluations of romantic partners were high regardless of current relationship quality. However, this work did not examine the

associations between people's implicit self-esteem and their implicit partner evaluations. In addition, research has typically examined longer term changes in implicit regard rather than daily fluctuations. For example, Hicks and colleagues (2016) found that sexual frequency was associated with changes in automatic partner attitudes 3 years later. High-risk conflict-of-interest situations and a tendency toward self-protection have also been associated with less positive automatic attitudes toward a partner 4 years later (Murray et al., 2010). The current study adds to this literature by examining whether implicit self-esteem moderates associations between daily events and daily levels of implicit partner regard.

The Current Study

The current study uses a 21-day diary methodology to examine how daily negative events are associated with daily implicit regard for romantic partners and whether these associations are moderated by implicit or explicit self-esteem. To our knowledge, this is the first study examining factors related to daily levels of implicit partner regard, despite research showing the importance of implicit partner regard for long-term relationship satisfaction (Lee et al., 2010).

Although many studies have examined how romantic partner interactions are related to relationship functioning (e.g., Murray et al., 2002), research suggests events occurring outside the relationship can cause stress within the relationship as well (Bolger et al., 1989). For example, for low explicit self-esteem individuals, feeling loved and accepted appears to be dependent upon professional success (Murray, Griffin, et al., 2006). The current study extends this research by testing implicit self-esteem as a potential moderator and by examining three types of daily events: interactions with one's romantic partner, interpersonal interactions outside the relationship, and non-interpersonal events (e.g., work deadlines). This allows a more nuanced understanding of how specific types of daily events may be associated with daily relationship functioning.

In addition, we examine these associations within a sample of African American couples who are currently living together. Most relationship research has been conducted on White couples and exceptions have tended to focus on the effects of race-related stressors (discrimination or income) on relationship functioning (Broman, 2005; Lavner et al., 2018; Lincoln & Chae, 2010; Ong et al., in press). Researchers have not fully explored relationship functioning among African American couples outside these topics. The current study seeks to reduce this gap in the literature by contributing to research examining more general factors that may be related to African American couples'

daily relationship functioning (Barr et al., 2013; Helm & Carlson, 2013).

Among individuals with low implicit self-esteem, we expected experiencing greater negative events of all three types to be associated with lower implicit partner regard. Among individuals with high implicit self-esteem, we expected implicit partner regard to be positive regardless of daily negative events.¹ We expected a statistically unique effect of implicit self-esteem controlling for explicit self-esteem.

Method

Participants

Participants were 180 African American couples ($N = 360$)² recruited from communities throughout the Chicago area using advertisements on posters and community message boards (most couples recruited from Chicago Transit Authority Red Line advertisements). Couples were eligible if both partners were at least 18 years old, both identified as African American, the partners were living together (not commuting), and both had daily internet access. Participants completed an average of 16.20 daily surveys ($SD = 5.96$) out of a possible 21 (5 participants did not complete any daily surveys and were not included in the analysis). Most couples were not married (64%) and other sex (88%). Most participants had at least a high school diploma or GED (97%) and about half had a bachelor's or associate's degree (46%). About half of participants reported an income less than US\$25,000 (56%) with the next highest income bracket being US\$25,000 to US\$50,000 (30%). Ages ranged from 18 to 73 years ($M = 36.61$, $SD = 12.38$), participants had been in their current relationship from 0 to 37.92 years ($M = 7.38$, $SD = 8.55$), and about half of participants reported having at least one child (46%).

Procedure

During in-person orientation sessions, couples learned about the diary study and participants completed online surveys including demographic and background measures. During the 21-day diary portion of the study, each member of participating couples received a link via email to that night's survey to be completed between 8 p.m. and 4 a.m. (to allow completion after work, before sleep). Each day, participants reported events they had experienced, rated affect, and completed an implicit partner regard measure.³ Participants were asked to not discuss their responses with their partners until they had completed the study. Couples were compensated US\$50 for the background questionnaire and up to US\$125 for the daily diaries. In addition, each day both members of the couple completed

the daily survey on time, and the couple received a ticket toward a US\$500 lottery.

Measures

Background Measures (Time 1)

Demographic and Relationship Variables. Participants reported their age, gender, relationship length, and marital status. Participants also completed an 18-item relationship quality measure (e.g., “How much can you count on your partner?”) on a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *extremely*; $\alpha = .94$; Fletcher et al., 2000).

Explicit Self-Esteem. Participants completed the Rosenberg (1965) 10-item self-esteem measure (e.g., “I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others”), indicating the extent to which they agreed with each item on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). After reverse coding, scores were averaged so that higher values represent higher self-esteem ($\alpha = .81$).

Implicit Self-Esteem. Participants’ Time 1 implicit self-esteem was assessed via the name-letter test (Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997; Nuttin, 1987). Participants rated how much they liked each letter of the alphabet on a 9-point scale (1 = *dislike very much*, 9 = *like very much*). Mean liking was computed for each letter using scores from participants whose initials do not include those letters. Participants’ preference for their first and last initials was computed by subtracting that letter’s mean liking score from their rating of their initials. Implicit self-esteem was computed by averaging difference scores for first and last name initials ($r = .47$, $p < .001$). Higher values indicate a greater preference for their own initials and higher implicit self-esteem.

Daily Measures

Daily Events. Participants indicated whether they had experienced discrete daily events from the Inventory of Small Life Events (Zautra et al., 1986) and rated occurring events on 7-point scales (negative events: 0 = *did not occur*, 1 = *not at all negative*, 7 = *extremely negative*; positive events: 1 = *not at all positive*, 7 = *extremely positive*). Ratings were recoded so that 0 represented events that did not occur or were not at all negative/positive and other events were rated up to 6 (*extremely negative/positive*). Negative and positive event scores were calculated by summing ratings of events within each of the three categories: events occurring within the relationship (six negative events, for example, “I was criticized by my spouse/partner”; six positive events, for example, “I expressed love to my spouse/partner”), interpersonal events occurring outside the relationship (18 negative events, for example, “I was criticized by a friend/acquaintance”; 13 positive events, for example, “I went to a club or organized group

meeting”), and non-interpersonal events (eight negative events, for example, “I had an unexpected expense over US\$50 but under US\$500”; nine positive events, for example, “I completed work on a major task or project”).

Negative Affect. Participants indicated the extent to which they had experienced each of 6 negative emotions (i.e., distressed, angry, dejected, ashamed, nervous, sad) that day on a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *extremely*; Feldman Barrett & Russell, 1998). Daily scores were averaged so that higher scores indicated greater negative affect ($\alpha = .88^4$).

Implicit Partner Regard. Participants’ implicit partner regard was assessed using an adaptation of the name-letter test (Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997; Nuttin, 1987). Each day, participants rated how much they liked each letter of the alphabet on a 9-point scale (1 = *dislike very much*, 9 = *like very much*). Mean liking was computed for each letter using scores from participants whose partners’ initials do not include those letters. Implicit partner regard was computed by subtracting the daily average rating of that letter from the participants’ daily rating of their partner’s first initial. Last name initials were not used in calculations because many participants were married and shared the last name initial with their partner. Higher values indicate a greater preference for their partner’s first initial and higher implicit partner regard.

Analysis Plan

Because our design contains two levels of data in which days are crossed with a person (Level 1) and individuals are nested within couples (Level 2), analyses must factor in nonindependence between dyads and observations (Kenny et al., 2006). We used the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006) with multilevel regression analyses using SPSS, which uses listwise deletion at the day level (i.e., participants with missing days were included in the analyses if they had some daily observations; however, person-days were not included if they included missing variables). The over-time APIM controls for interdependence in dyad members’ daily responses by running a series of multilevel regression models with the mixed-models procedure for indistinguishable dyadic data and allows for correlations between dyads at each time (Campbell & Kashy, 2002; Kenny et al., 2006). However, this procedure does not handle the error structure for over-time non-distinguishable dyadic data. Because our data contain information from both members of relationship dyads and some dyads are indistinguishable (i.e., same-sex couples), we modeled sum and difference variables for the random intercepts and slopes with unstructured covariance matrices (D. Kenny, personal communication, August 16, 2020; Kenny, 2017; Woody & Sadler, 2005). If dyads are

indistinguishable, these sum and difference variables should be uncorrelated, allowing the random statements to be uncorrelated. Nonsignificant variance components were fixed to zero. Level 1 predictor variables were person-centered (i.e., each participant's mean across the 21 days was subtracted from daily levels); this allowed us to disentangle within- versus between-person associations (Kenny et al., 1998; Nezlek, 2001). Therefore, a participant's coefficient for daily negative events describes the relation between deviations from that person's average daily negative events score and their level of implicit partner regard. We controlled for gender (1 = *female*, -1 = *male*), age, parenthood status (1 = *parent*, -1 = *non-parent*), marital status (1 = *married*, -1 = *not married*), relationship type (1 = *other sex*, -1 = *same sex*), relationship length, Time 1 relationship quality, actor's daily negative affect, and positive events from that category (i.e., relationship, outside relationship, non-interpersonal).

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for between-person and aggregated daily variables are presented in Table 1. Higher average levels of daily implicit partner regard were associated with higher relationship quality, higher explicit and implicit self-esteem, and greater positive relationship events but with less negative mood and less negative non-interpersonal events. Implicit and explicit self-esteem were positively correlated as in previous research (Bosson et al., 2000). In addition, higher implicit and explicit self-esteem were both associated with higher relationship quality and less negative mood. Higher implicit self-esteem was also associated with more positive relationship events and less negative non-relationship interpersonal and non-interpersonal events. Negative mood was associated with more negative events of all three types, more positive non-relationship interpersonal events, and less positive relationship events. Finally, participants who reported more negative events also tended to report more positive events except that there was no association between positive and negative relationship events.

Romantic Relationship Events

We tested Time 1 explicit and implicit self-esteem as moderators of the daily association between negative romantic relationship events and implicit partner regard (4,660 valid cases). Daily negative romantic relationship events were not associated with implicit partner regard, and this was not moderated by implicit or explicit self-esteem (see Table 2).⁵ However, older participants, participants with higher relationship quality, participants in other sex relationships, and participants with higher implicit self-esteem reported higher daily levels of implicit partner regard. In addition, daily positive romantic relationship events were related to higher daily implicit partner regard.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Between-Subjects and Aggregate Daily Variables.

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	36.61 (12.38)	—											
2. Relationship quality	7.75 (1.24)	.02	—										
3. Explicit self-esteem	6.20 (0.88)	.07	.16*	—									
4. Implicit self-esteem	1.50 (1.58)	.11*	.19**	.28**	—								
5. Negative mood	2.20 (1.29)	-.15**	-.16**	-.32**	-.16**	—							
6. Negative relationship events	2.26 (3.92)	-.03	-.19**	-.06	-.06	.59**	—						
7. Negative non-relationship interpersonal events	3.01 (8.40)	.02	.01	-.07	-.11*	.52**	.77**	—					
8. Negative non-interpersonal events	1.66 (3.51)	.01	-.04	-.09	-.13*	.51**	.72**	.94**	—				
9. Positive relationship events	10.29 (7.12)	.16**	.32**	.10	.14**	-.15**	.05	.19**	.17**	—			
10. Positive non-relationship interpersonal events	5.71 (7.90)	.09	.06	.02	-.03	.19**	.44**	.62**	.56**	.43**	—		
11. Positive non-interpersonal events	4.47 (5.61)	.17**	.09	.10	.02	.10	.44**	.65**	.58**	.49**	.83**	—	
12. Implicit partner regard	0.53 (1.87)	.22**	.21**	.14**	.33**	-.18**	-.07	-.11	-.12**	.24**	.06	.08	—

Note. Mood, event variables, and implicit partner regard included here represent averages across the daily survey.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2. Daily Implicit Partner Regard as a Function of Self-Esteem and Daily Negative Events.

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	<i>d</i>
Relationship events							
Age	0.03	0.01	2.63	197	.01	[0.01, 0.05]	0.37
Gender	0.03	0.09	0.29	207	.78	[-0.15, 0.20]	0.04
Relationship type	0.34	0.15	2.36	292	.02	[0.06, 0.63]	0.28
Marital status	-0.07	0.13	-0.49	204	.62	[-0.33, 0.20]	0.07
Parenthood status	-0.02	0.12	-0.13	245	.90	[-0.24, 0.21]	0.02
Relationship length	0.001	0.001	0.64	185	.52	[-0.002, 0.004]	0.09
Relationship quality	0.19	0.08	2.29	295	.03	[0.02, 0.35]	0.27
Daily negative mood	-0.02	0.02	-1.13	4211	.26	[-0.06, 0.02]	0.03
Explicit self-esteem	0.13	0.12	1.09	302	.28	[-0.11, 0.37]	0.13
Implicit self-esteem	0.27	0.07	3.92	315	<.001	[0.13, 0.40]	0.44
Daily positive relationship events	0.01	0.003	4.26	4017	<.001	[0.01, 0.02]	0.13
Daily negative relationship events	-0.01	0.01	-1.51	164	.13	[-0.03, 0.004]	0.24
Daily Negative Relationship Events × Explicit Self-Esteem	-0.01	0.01	-1.42	939	.16	[-0.02, 0.004]	0.09
Daily Negative Relationship Events × Implicit Self-Esteem	0.001	0.003	0.16	544	.87	[-0.01, 0.01]	0.01
Non-relationship interpersonal events							
Daily positive non-relationship interpersonal events	-0.001	0.003	-0.47	4045	.64	[-0.01, 0.01]	0.01
Daily negative non-relationship interpersonal events	-0.004	0.01	-0.69	58	.49	[-0.02, 0.01]	0.18
Daily Negative Non-Relationship Interpersonal Events × Explicit Self-esteem	-0.01	0.01	-2.32	109	.02	[-0.02, -0.002]	0.44
Daily Negative Non-Relationship Interpersonal events × Implicit Self-Esteem	0.01	0.003	2.55	243	.01	[0.002, 0.01]	0.33
Non-interpersonal events							
Daily positive non-interpersonal events	0.01	0.01	1.99	3997	.05	[0.000, 0.02]	0.06
Daily negative non-interpersonal events	-0.01	0.01	-0.95	114	.35	[-0.03, 0.01]	0.18
Daily Negative Non-Interpersonal Events × Explicit Self-Esteem	-0.01	0.01	-0.53	168	.60	[-0.02, 0.01]	0.08
Daily Negative Non-Interpersonal Events × Implicit Self-Esteem	0.02	0.01	2.70	239	.01	[0.004, 0.03]	0.35

Note. Gender (1 = female, -1 = male), relationship type (1 = other sex, -1 = same sex), marital status (1 = married, -1 = not married), and parenthood status (1 = parent, -1 = non-parent). CI = confidence interval.

Interpersonal Events Outside the Romantic Relationship

We next tested Time 1 explicit and implicit self-esteem as moderators of the daily association between negative interpersonal events with people outside the relationship and implicit partner regard (4,578 valid cases). Both explicit and implicit self-esteem moderated the daily association between daily negative non-relationship interpersonal events and daily implicit partner regard (see Table 2). We probed the significant Daily Negative Non-Relationship Interpersonal Events × Implicit Self-Esteem interaction using the procedures outlined by Aiken and West (1991). This revealed no significant effect of negative non-relationship interpersonal events on daily implicit partner regard among participants with high implicit self-esteem, $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(70) = 0.93$, $p = .36$, $d = 0.22$, but a significant negative effect among participants with low implicit self-esteem, $b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(105) = -2.06$, $p = .04$, $d = 0.40$ (see Figure 1).⁶ On days participants reported greater negativity in their interactions with other people, people with low implicit self-esteem had a more negative implicit regard for their relationship partner.

Non-Interpersonal Events

Finally, we tested Time 1 explicit and implicit self-esteem as moderators of the daily association between negative

non-interpersonal events and implicit partner regard (4m695 valid cases). Implicit (but not explicit) self-esteem moderated the daily association between negative non-interpersonal events and implicit partner regard (see Table 2). Probing of the significant Daily Negative Non-Interpersonal Events × Implicit Self-Esteem interaction revealed no significant effect of negative non-interpersonal events on daily implicit partner regard among participants with high implicit self-esteem, $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(128) = 1.06$, $p = .29$, $d = 0.19$, but a significant negative effect among participants with low implicit self-esteem, $b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(179) = -2.43$, $p = .02$, $d = 0.36$ (see Figure 2). On days participants reported greater negativity in daily non-interpersonal events, those with low implicit self-esteem had more negative implicit regard for their relationship partner.

Exploratory Analyses

We tested age, gender, parenthood status, relationship type, relationship length, and relationship quality as additional moderators. Analyses revealed few significant results and no consistent patterns except age analyses (see Table 3). For all three types of daily events, there was a significant Daily Negative Events × Implicit Self-Esteem × Age interaction. Probing revealed a similar pattern across event types; we therefore aggregated across event

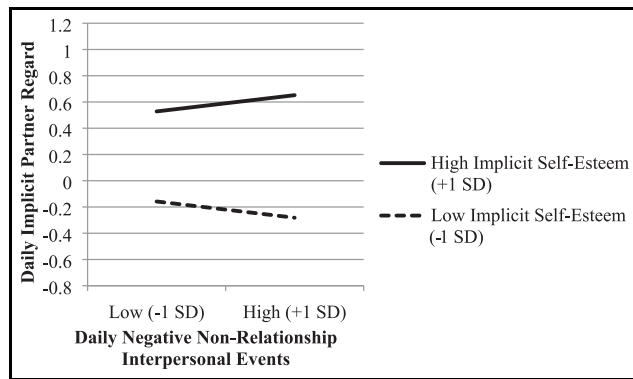


Figure 1. Daily Implicit Partner Regard as a Function of Implicit Self-Esteem and Daily Negative Non-Relationship Interpersonal Events.

type.⁷ There was no significant Daily Negative Events \times Implicit Self-Esteem interaction among younger ($-1SD$, 24 years) participants, $b = -0.004$, $SE = 0.003$, $t(705) = -1.41$, $p = .16$, $d = 0.11$. However, there was a significant Daily Negative Events \times Implicit Self-Esteem interaction among older ($+1SD$, 49 years) participants, $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.003$, $t(204) = 3.28$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.46$. Among older participants, there was no significant effect of negative events on daily implicit partner regard among participants with high implicit self-esteem, $b = 0.002$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(98) = 0.27$, $p = .79$, $d = 0.05$, but a significant negative effect among participants with low implicit self-esteem, $b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(151) = -3.43$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.56$ (see Figure 3).

Discussion

This study is the first to test whether implicit self-esteem uniquely moderates the associations between three types of daily negative events and daily implicit partner regard. Consistent with hypotheses, implicit self-esteem was an important factor in daily associations between negative events and implicit partner regard. In analyses of interpersonal events with people other than the relationship partner and non-interpersonal events, low implicit self-esteem participants reported lower implicit partner regard on days with more negative events. This association was not found for high implicit self-esteem participants and explicit self-esteem did not moderate these associations. Interestingly, implicit self-esteem did not moderate the effect of negative romantic relationship events on daily implicit partner regard nor was the main effect of negative romantic relationship events significant. Future research could examine whether partner support, responsiveness, or forgiveness moderate these findings. It is possible that these or other variables masked the relation between relationship events and implicit partner regard if participants, for example, had positive associations between relationship events and

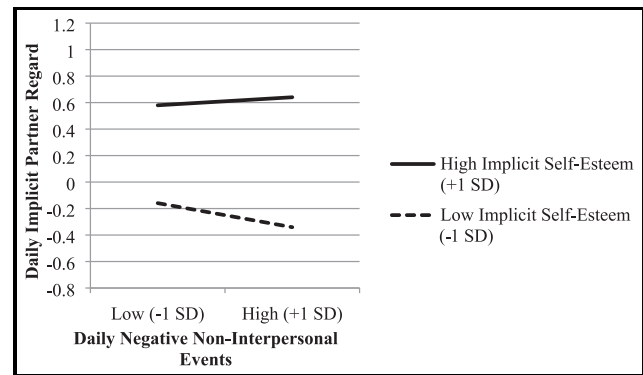


Figure 2. Daily Implicit Partner Regard as a Function of Implicit Self-Esteem and Daily Negative Non-Interpersonal Events.

implicit partner regard when partners reacted favorably but negative associations when partners reacted poorly. In addition, there was a significant positive association between positive romantic relationship events and implicit partner regard. This suggests that, within the context of romantic relationships, positive events may outweigh negative ones (Totenhagen et al., 2012). This is in line with research showing that expressing gratitude toward a partner increased automatic partner evaluations (Baker, 2021), although further research is needed to see whether these findings will replicate. Consistent with previous work (DeHart et al., 2011), there was also an overall main effect of implicit self-esteem predicting implicit partner evaluations such that high implicit self-esteem participants reported more positive daily implicit partner evaluations.

We believe these results have important implications for five interrelated reasons. First, although the majority of relationship research has focused on White participants or focused on race-related stressors (Lavner et al., 2018; Lincoln & Chae, 2010; Ong et al., in press), the current study fills a gap in the literature by examining implicit self-esteem and relationship functioning among an exclusively African American sample. Second, the results corroborate existing evidence that implicit self-esteem may be a better predictor of implicit outcomes than explicit self-esteem (McNulty et al., 2014; Peterson & DeHart, 2013).

Third, although daily negative relationship events appeared unrelated to implicit partner regard, exploratory analyses revealed that, among older participants, all three types of negative events were related to lower implicit partner regard among low implicit self-esteem participants. Of note, this moderation effect seems specific to age rather than relationship length, gender, parenthood status, or relationship quality. It is possible that both the decreasing size of individuals' social networks over the lifespan (Wrzus et al., 2013) and increasing other-focus in middle adulthood (Gerbaso & Prentice, 2013) are related to the increased importance of the romantic partner over time. As social networks contract, individuals may feel more dependent

Table 3. Moderators of the Daily Association Between Self-Esteem, Daily Negative Events, and Daily Implicit Partner Regard.

	Daily Negative Events × Explicit Self-Esteem × Moderator			Daily Negative Events × Implicit Self-Esteem × Moderator		
	b (SE)	95% CI	p	b (SE)	95% CI	p
Age						
Relationship events	-0.01 (0.001)	[-0.002, -0.0001]	.03	0.001 (0.0004)	[0.0004, 0.002]	.003
Non-relationship interpersonal events	-0.001 (0.0004)	[-0.001, 0.0002]	.17	0.001 (0.0003)	[0.0003, 0.001]	.004
Non-interpersonal events	-0.001 (0.001)	[-0.003, 0.001]	.20	0.001 (0.001)	[0.0002, 0.002]	.03
Gender						
Relationship events	0.02 (0.01)	[-0.001, 0.03]	.07	0.01 (0.004)	[-0.002, 0.01]	.16
Non-relationship interpersonal events	0.01 (0.01)	[-0.002, 0.02]	.11	-0.003 (0.003)	[-0.01, 0.003]	.33
Non-interpersonal events	0.02 (0.01)	[0.003, 0.04]	.03	-0.01 (0.01)	[-0.02, 0.01]	.38
Parenthood status						
Relationship events	0.004 (0.01)	[-0.01, 0.02]	.60	0.003 (0.004)	[-0.004, 0.01]	.33
Non-relationship interpersonal events	0.01 (0.01)	[0.004, 0.02]	.01	-0.002 (0.003)	[-0.01, 0.004]	.48
Non-interpersonal events	0.04 (0.01)	[0.02, 0.06]	<.001	-0.01, 0.01	[-0.02, 0.01]	.25
Relationship type						
Relationship events	-0.01 (0.02)	[-0.06, 0.03]	.54	-0.0002 (0.01)	[-0.01, 0.01]	.98
Non-relationship interpersonal events	-0.01 (0.02)	[-0.05, 0.04]	.82	0.0001 (0.01)	[-0.01, 0.01]	.99
Non-interpersonal events	0.02 (0.03)	[-0.03, 0.08]	.41	-0.02 (0.01)	[-0.04, 0.01]	.17
Relationship length						
Relationship events	-0.0001 (0.0001)	[-0.0002, 0.0001]	.27	0.0001 (0.0001)	[-0.00004, 0.0002]	.18
Non-relationship interpersonal events	0.0001 (0.00004)	[-0.000001, 0.0002]	.05	0.00001 (0.000004)	[-0.00001, 0.0002]	.09
Non-interpersonal events	0.0002 (0.0001)	[0.000001, 0.0004]	.04	-0.00002 (0.0001)	[-0.0002, 0.0001]	.78
Relationship quality						
Relationship events	0.01 (0.004)	[-0.002, 0.01]	.13	0.002 (0.002)	[-0.001, 0.01]	.14
Non-relationship interpersonal events	-0.01 (0.003)	[-0.01, 0.001]	.08	0.002 (0.001)	[-0.0002, 0.004]	.07
Non-interpersonal events	-0.02 (0.01)	[-0.04, -0.01]	.01	0.01 (0.004)	[0.001, 0.02]	.03

Note. CI = confidence interval.

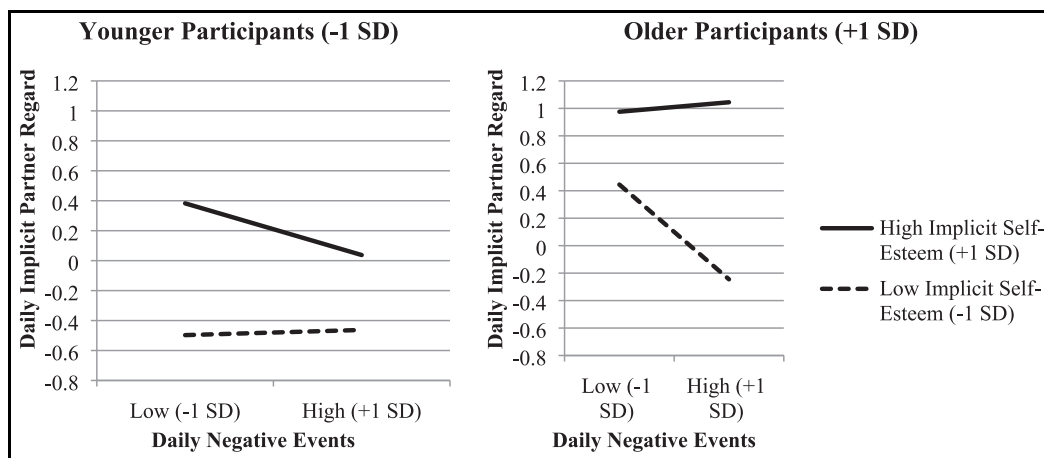


Figure 3. Daily Implicit Partner Regard as a Function of Implicit Self-Esteem, Daily Negative Events, and Age.

upon their romantic partner, increasing the sensitivity of the risk regulation system. In addition, due to greater self-focus within emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2006; Gerbasi & Prentice, 2013), implicit partner regard among younger participants may primarily reflect an individual's implicit self-esteem. Consistent with this idea, results for younger participants revealed only a main effect of implicit self-esteem. Emerging adults (i.e., individuals aged 19–29) spend more time alone than individuals in other stages of life, have fewer social obligations, and tend to view this period in life as a time for self-focus before committing to enduring relationships (Arnett, 2006). Younger participants' implicit partner regard may be based more upon their implicit regard for themselves than external events or a sense of interdependence. While unexpected, these findings highlight the potential importance of age in understanding implicit risk regulation processes and provide novel areas of investigation for future research.

Fourth, the current study is the first to examine factors that be related to daily implicit partner regard. Prior research has focused on implicit partner regard as a predictor, showing, for example, that changes in implicit regard following major life transitions are related to relationship functioning (Murray et al., 2019). Given the importance of implicit partner regard for relationship functioning and persistence (LeBel & Campbell, 2009; Lee et al., 2010) and the relation between implicit partner regard and daily relationship behaviors (LeBel & Campbell, 2013), understanding how different types of negative events and chronic individual differences are related to daily levels of implicit partner regard may enhance understanding of relationship functioning. The current study takes the first step in this exploration, suggesting that, at least for low implicit self-esteem individuals, daily events outside the relationship are related to daily implicit partner regard.

Finally, the current study enhances understanding of the risk regulation model, highlighting the importance of

implicit self-esteem in models of relationship functioning (DeHart et al., 2011; Peterson & DeHart, 2013). The current study suggests implicit self-esteem is important in understanding how people regulate implicit evaluations of a romantic partner following different types of threat. Given the importance of implicit partner regard for relationship functioning and persistence (Faure et al., 2018; LeBel & Campbell, 2009; McNulty et al., 2014), further research on the role of implicit self-esteem in the risk regulation system is warranted. Future researchers may also want to examine attachment insecurity as a moderator of the association between daily experiences and implicit partner regard as the risk regulation system can also be sensitized by attachment insecurity (Derrick & Murray, 2007).

Despite the strengths of the daily diary methodology, this study did have some limitations. Our daily diary methodology is correlational in nature. Thus, we cannot be sure that daily associations represent causal relationships between daily negative events and implicit partner regard. Future research could use an experimental design to test for causal effects. The current study also examined couples who were currently living together and likely to experience greater dependence. Research could test whether results generalize to less committed couples for whom the risk of rejection is less threatening.

Despite these limitations, the current study replicates past work on the importance of implicit self-esteem in guiding risk regulation processes (e.g., DeHart et al., 2011; Peterson & DeHart, 2013) and extends such work to a sample of African American couples. Results suggest implicit self-esteem is an important factor in relationship functioning, moderating the daily association between negative events and implicit partner regard. By examining three types of daily negative events, we provide evidence that interactions with people other than a relationship partner and even non-interpersonal events can have consequences for relationship

functioning. Furthermore, the unexpected findings with age suggest important avenues for future research.

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Notes

1. Hypotheses not preregistered due to previous analyses. Study measures and code at https://osf.io/34e72/?view_only=e733dabde52142d18f57df702a5cb437
2. This study analyzes preexisting data, but large number of daily surveys provides adequate power.
3. The daily survey included measures of experiences with discrimination not relevant to the current work.
4. Alpha calculated across all diary surveys. Alphas calculated for each daily survey ranged from .82 to .92.
5. The pattern of results presented in Table 2 remains the same when all covariates are removed and when implicit and explicit self-esteem are analyzed separately.
6. Probing the significant Daily Negative Non-Relationship Interpersonal Events \times Explicit Self-Esteem interaction revealed no significant effect of negative non-relationship interpersonal events on daily implicit partner regard among participants with high, $b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(72) = -1.74$, $p = .09$, $d = 0.41$, or low, $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(69) = 0.93$, $p = .36$, $d = 0.24$, explicit self-esteem.
7. The pattern of results with age remains the same when all covariates are removed. When implicit and explicit self-esteem are analyzed separately, only the Daily Negative Non-Relationship Events \times Implicit Self-Esteem \times Age interaction remains significant.

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